

**Official Transcript**  
**Secretary of Defense Robert Gates**  
**Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu**  
**Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi**  
**Pristina Airport**  
**October 7, 2008**

**President Sejdiu:** Greetings. I am happy to inform you that I had a very good meeting with Mr. Robert Gates, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, together with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense. It is important for us to emphasize the strong support that the United States of America has given Kosovo, its commitment over a long period of time, and its ongoing commitment to a democratic Kosovo for all its citizens. An important show of this support is the U.S.'s help in building the Kosovo Security Force, together with our European allies and allies from the rest of the democratic world, which will help Kosovo develop more rapidly. I wish to thank the Secretary for his warm welcome for me and for the Prime Minister when we visited Washington in July, and for the special commitment that President Bush and the American Government showed. We are grateful for this great help that they have given to Kosovo. Thank you.

**PM Thaçi:** On behalf of Kosovo I wish to thank Secretary Gates, the Government of the United States of America and President Bush for their continuous support for Kosovo. We have informed the Secretary of our engagement as institutions of the Republic of Kosovo in implementing President Ahtisaari's plan, to the integration of minorities in Kosovo's institutions and society, to the functioning of democracy in the region, and naturally, to integrating into European Union and NATO structures. Kosovo's relations as a state will be, as usual, very close with the United States of America. We will continue to implement all democratic criteria necessary to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures. I wish to thank Secretary Gates for the full support of the Government of the United States of America, and for helping to develop the Kosovo Security Force according to the pro-western principles and standards of NATO.

**Secretary Gates:** Good morning. I very much appreciate this chance to have met with the President, the Prime Minister, and Minister for the Kosovo Security Force, Minister Mujota, and I'd like to congratulate you on your recent appointment. This is my first visit to Kosovo, and the first visit of a U.S. cabinet member since Kosovo declared independence some seven months ago. And so I'm pleased to be here to congratulate your leaders in person and to reemphasize our commitment to all of the citizens of Kosovo. This morning we had productive discussions on a number of issues including the future of the KSF. We look forward to the creation of a diverse, professional security force with civilian oversight. We also discussed our commitment to maintain current U.S. troop levels as the United Nations transitions some of its authorities to the European Union. I reaffirmed the pledge that President Bush made to the people of this region and to our NATO partners: "We came in together, and we will go out together." And of course we all look forward to the day when, as President Bush said, "peace is self-sustaining." In addition to congratulating the leaders of this, the newest nation on earth, there is another purpose for my visit, and that is to thank our troops who are stationed

here. We often hear about deployments elsewhere in the world, but I want to personally convey to the members of the Kosovo Force that they are neither forgotten nor unappreciated. Their mission here is vital—a point made abundantly clear in our meetings this morning. And because of the dedication and professionalism of our troops, KFOR remains the most respected and trusted institution in Kosovo, and it has helped transform a once troubled region into a peaceful place for all citizens have the opportunity to live in freedom. Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Gazmend Sylaj, *Koha Ditore* daily newspaper. Mr. Gates, last week a high official from Serbia mentioned partition of Kosovo as the final goal that Serbia is aiming to achieve regarding Kosovo. What do you think about this? And do you think that this statement and these goals endanger the fragile security situation in Kosovo and in the region? Thank you.

**Secretary Gates:** I want to say that I do not believe partition is a solution in Kosovo now, or at any time in the future. The United States supports the territorial integrity of Kosovo.

**QUESTION:** Peter Finn of the *Washington Post*. For the President: when independence was declared there was a great deal of optimism here that up to a hundred countries, possibly more, would recognize Kosovo's independence. That hasn't happened and I'm wondering to what extent you've been disappointed by that.

And for the Prime Minister: the issue of partition came up and I wondered to what extent you're concerned that de facto partition is already emerging and deepening in northern Kosovo.

**President Sejdiu:** We can say that Kosovo has been recognized by a large number of important countries and we expect that we will have more recognitions. For us it is very important to have strong support from all the countries that have recognized the Republic of Kosovo, its sovereignty and independence. It is also important that there be a very positive approach from other countries in the process of recognizing the Republic of Kosovo. Certainly it is our wish, and that of Kosovo's friends, to increase the number of recognitions so that Kosovo can become a member in international mechanisms. Therefore, we expect that soon the process of recognition by regional countries will be finalized—meaning neighboring countries. For the countries surrounding us, especially Macedonia and Montenegro, it is their choice to decide. But I can say that there are extraordinary positive signs and I very much appreciated the discussions I had with the presidents of these countries. There have been favorable signs from other countries as well, which will continue to move forward.

**PM Thaçi:** The independence of Kosovo has brought even greater regional peace, stability and cooperation, and we have developed excellent relations with Macedonia, which has recognized the passport of the Republic of Kosovo, along with Albania and Montenegro who have recognized the passport of the Republic of Kosovo. We are ready to cooperate with Serbia as two separate countries, on concrete issues that are in the

interest of our two countries and our two nations. The territorial integrity of the Republic of Kosovo is untouchable, unbreakable and recognized internationally. No part of the territory in the region is an isolated issue. But we want, we believe in, and we are investing in more peace, stability, cooperation and integration into European Union and NATO structures for Kosovo and the region. You know that President Tadic himself regretted his statement of a few days ago.

**QUESTION:** Shkumbin Ahmetxhekaj, RTK. You mentioned the promise of President Bush about the decision to supply Kosovo with weapons—to supply the Kosovo Force Security. So, to what extent will the U.S. administration carry on with this decision? To what extent will you arm the new Security Forces of Kosovo?

**Secretary Gates:** What we are focused on initially is providing services, equipment, and training for the new Ministry and the Kosovo Security Force. As I told the President and the Prime Minister, we also have money in our fiscal year 09 budget for individual military education and training (IMET programs), and also for foreign military financing. And so I think that you will see the development of a full range of assistance in terms of specific equipment. Frankly, I'm not sure exactly what we have committed to send initially, but I expect that we will have a full relationship with the Kosovo Security Force.

**QUESTION:** Question for Mr. Secretary. The unemployment in Kosovo is averaging about 50%. Does this region need more soft power?

**Secretary Gates:** I think this region needs more economic development and probably economic assistance. There are a lot of opportunities. I think the fact that a number of nations have agreed participate in a European Rule of Law Mission, as well as KFOR indicate that there are significant number of countries that have an interest in the success of Kosovo. And clearly that success depends also on its economic development. And so I think that there are opportunities both for economic assistance but above all, for investment in Kosovo. That's the long term solution.

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